FOUNDED 1886
VOLUME 148, No. 352

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The Charlotte Observer

CHARLOTTEOBSERVER.COM

Panthers to be sold, Richardson says

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Panthers owner Jerry Richardson sits in the owner's box at Bank of America Stadium on Sunday with his wife, Rosalind, left. Sports Illustrated reported that at least four former Panthers employees have received "significant" monetary settlements from the team.

News comes after report of inappropriate conduct

BY JOSEPH PERSON, JOURDAN RODRIGUE, STEVE HARRISON AND RICK ROTHACKER
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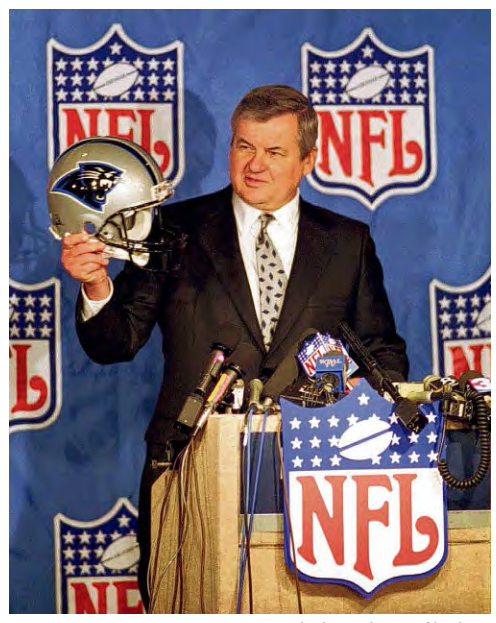
Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson said Sunday night that he will put the team up for sale at the end of the 2017 NFL season, hours after Sports Illustrated reported allegations of sexual and racial misconduct by Richardson toward former Panthers employees.

The team had announced an investigation into the alleged misconduct on Friday, but the NFL on Sunday said it would take over the investigation.

"There has been no greater mission or purpose in my life than to have brought an NFL franchise to Charlotte," Richardson said in a five-paragraph statement. Richardson has been the team's owner since the Panthers' inaugural 1995 season.

The statement didn't refer to the SI report, saying only that "I believe that it is time to turn the franchise over to new ownership."

At least four former Carolina Panthers employees have received "significant" monetary settlements as a result of inappropriate workplace comments and conduct by owner Jerry Richardson, Sports Illustrated reported Sunday. The conduct, the news outlet reported, included "sexually suggestive language and behavior, and on at least one occasion directing a racial slur at an African-American Panthers scout."



Charlotte Observer file photo

Jerry Richardson holds a helmet for his new team on Oct. 27, 1993. The NFL awarded the franchise in a unanimous choice of the 28 owners. The team began play in 1995.

SI said the settlements included nondisclosure agreements forbidding the parties from discussing the matters.

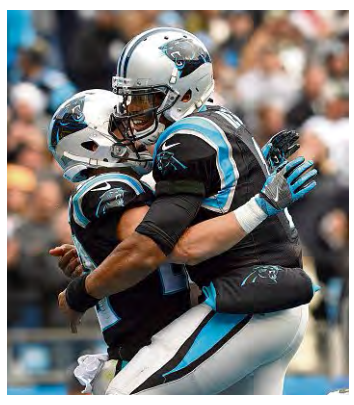
The Panthers refused comment on the report. Richardson, 81, attended the Panthers' 31-24 win over the Green Bay Packers, seated in the owner's box with his wife, Rosalind, at his side.

Players were not alerted to the announcement of the sale ahead of time, sources told the Observer. The players had left the stadium before the announcement broke.

Interim general manager Marty Hurney, formerly a longtime GM of the Panthers who was re-hired this spring in an interim role when Dave Gettleman was fired, told the Observer that he found out about Richardson's intent to sell after the game on Sunday night.

"If this happens, I think it's a major loss for the NFL," Hurney said in a conversation with the Observer. "(Richardson) has my utmost respect as an owner and as a person. He has the respect of the employees and players in the organization. I came back because of my respect for him and the organization he developed."

SEE PANTHERS, 6A



SPORTS

IT'S A COLORFUL DAY FOR CAM

Boosted by what he called the "Caucasian invasion" and some "butt drag swag," Cam Newton leads the Panthers past the Packers. 1B

LOCAL

FALLOUT COULD FOLLOW TEAM

Questions linger about repercussions from the NFL and possible financial fallout for the Panthers after allegations against the owner. 4A

NATION & WORLD

MUELLER'S JOB SAFE?

President Donald Trump said he's not considering firing special counsel Robert Mueller even as the Russia probe continues to grow. 8A

COMMENTARY

Richardson should assure that team doesn't relocate

BY SCOTT FOWLER
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Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson has one last chance to salvage a piece of his legacy.

He must sell the team to an ownership group that will keep it in Charlotte.

On one of the more extraordinary days in Panthers history Sunday, Carolina edged the Green Bay Packers 31-24 in a shootout at Bank of America Stadium. And yet the game was a distant third in terms of news value.

Items No. 1 and 2, in chronological order: Sports Illustrated published an explosive story that alleged all sorts of workplace misconduct by Richardson, the Panthers' 81-year-old owner. Those allegations included sexual harassment, a racial slur and the owner asking some of his female employees if he could "personally shave their legs."

And then, about seven hours after that report, Richardson suddenly announced he is selling the Panthers. He made no mention of the allegations, acting as if the timing of this blockbuster announcement was merely coincidental.

"I believe that it is time to turn the franchise over to new ownership," Richardson said in a five-paragraph statement released by the Panthers Sunday night. "Therefore, I will put the team up for sale at the conclusion of this NFL season. We will not begin the sale process, nor will we entertain any inquiries, until the very last game is played."

So, ladies and gentlemen, open up your bank statements and take a look to see if you qualify. On second thought, forget that: If you have to look, you're not going to be in the running. Forbes magazine recently valued the Panthers at $2.3 billion.

Ideally, Richardson will sell the team to a local ownership group – maybe some of his minority partners will even buy him out. And there certainly are other rich people in the Carolinas – not many, but a handful

SEE FOWLER, 4A

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Carolina Panthers owner Jerry Richardson, shown with coach Ron Rivera, left, during rookie minicamp in May, announced Sunday evening that he will sell the team at the end of the season.

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